

Message Text

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47

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AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

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TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MP

SUBJECT: MAURITIAN PRESS ON DIEGO RENEGOTIATION

THE WIDELY READ PORT LOUIS DAILY L'EXPRESS ON NOVEMBER 4 HEAD-
LINED THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE, TRANSLATED BY THE EMBASSY.

QTE

"MAURITIUS TO RENEGOTIATE DIEGO"

--ALL THE RESOURCES OF "POWER GAME" IN ACTION

--AGALEGA IN THE BALANCE

--TEHERAN HAS TO BE PAID

" IN THE COURSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH OPENED LAST WEEK IN

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LONDON AND WASHINGTON AND WHICH WILL CONTINUE THIS WEEK BETWEEN

THE UK AND USA ON THE QUESTION OF BRITISH BASES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE DEFENSE POLICY OF THE TWO COUNTRIES IN THIS AREA, A MAURITIAN PROPOSAL FOR THE RENEGOTIATION OF THE "TACIT CONTRACT" BY WHICH DIEGO WAS CEDED TO UK IS BEING STUDIED. FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED IN MAURITIUS, IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE FATE OF THE ARCHIPELAGO, DESTINED TO BECOME A MILITARY BASE, COULD CHANGE.

" IT MUST BE SAID THAT THE GOM HAS SOME EXCELLENT ASSETS TO PUSH FOR A RENEGOTIATION OF THE CONTRACT--IN THE FIRST INSTANCE WITH BOTH UK AND USA ON THE QUESTION OF RENT. OUR (L'EXPRESS) INFORMATION IS THAT THE SUM PROPOSED IS RS 100 MILLION PER YEAR -- THE COST OF A WARSHIP (REMEMBER: DIEGO WAS 'CEDED' TO UK FOR RS 40 MILLION).

". THE AMMOUNT, QUALIFIED AS 'UNDERESTIMATED BUT REASONABLE IN THE 1974 ECONOMIC CONTEXT' SEEMS NEVERTHELESS TO HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED EXAGGERATED BY THE TWO POWERS. THEY WOULD BE PREPARED, IN THE EVENT OF AN AGREEMENT, TO 'RENT' DIEGO FOR THE SUM FOR WHICH IT WAS ORIGINALLY 'CEDED' (RS. 40 MILLION).

" TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE WEIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES, GOM HAS ALSO ASKED THAT DIEGO BE NOT TURNED INTO A MILITARY BASE, BUT ONLY INTO A COMMUNICATIONS CENTER IN KEEPING WITH THE DECISIONS REACHED DURING THE 1965 NEGOTIATIONS. IT SEEMS THAT HERE TOO, 'DESPITE THE INTRANSIGENT ATTITUDE OF THE US, AVENUES OF DISCUSSIONS ARE POSSIBLE' IN THE CONTEXT OF BRITAIN'S RE-EXAMINATION OF ITS DEFENSE POLICY.

" IN MAURITIUS, THE FILE FOR RENEGOTIATION IS READY. IF ALL GOES AS PLANNED, A VAST PSYCHOLOGICAL CAMPAIGN WILL BE LAUNCHED WITH THE (ALREADY ACQUIRED) SUPPORT OF INDIAN OCEAN AND OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. IN FACT, THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN ON SINCE THE LAST BRITISH ELECTIONS AND WILSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE INTENDED TO PUBLISH A WHITE BOOK ON UK'S DEFENCE POLICY. BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM HAD BEEN RATHER CAUTIOUS ON THE DIEGO QUESTION WHILE OTHER COUNTRIES WERE SAYING ALL KINDS OF THINGS. RAMGOOLAM WAS CONTENT TO STATE THAT DIEGO WAS CEDED WHEN MAURITIUS WAS STILL A BRITISH COLONY. HE HAD EVEN DECLARED IN NEW DELHI THAT MAURITIUS HAD ABANDONED THE IDEA OF GOING TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.

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". SUBSEQUENTLY, IN THE COURSE OF ONE OF HIS CALCULATED DECLARATIONS IN THE RURAL AREAS, THE PM CHANGED HIS TONE. HE SAID THERE HAD BEEN A BREACH OF CONTRACT. WHILE THUS SUBTLY CONDITIONING PUBLIC OPINION AT HOME, HE LEFT IT TO OTHERS ABROAD TO MAKE THE CASE FOR DIEGO.

" AFTER THE BRITISH ELECTIONS AND WILSON'S DECLARATION,

THE PM DECIDED TO LAUNCH THE ATTACK IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. MRS. RANI HEERAMAN, HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY, ANNOUNCED IN TANANARIVE THAT MAURITIUS COULD EVENTUALLY GO TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE. MRS. HEERAMAN'S DECLARATION THAT SHE HAD EXPRESSED A PERSONAL OPINION MEANS NOTHING. THE FACT REMAINS THAT THE 'DIEGO FILE' FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COURT IS NOW READY AT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE.

" IF THE LONDON AND WASHINGTON NEGOTIATIONS DO NOT AUGUR TOO WELL, ONE CAN EXPECT THIS IDEA TO BE PUSHED VIGOROUSLY OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. ANOTHER CARD THE PM WOULD PLAY--AND ONE CAN EXPECT 'CALCULATED LEAKS' ON THIS SOON--IS THE QUESTION OF THE AGALEGA ISLANDS AND THE GROWING RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.

" GOM HAS STOPPED ALL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN AGALEGA THOUGH THE COMPANY WHICH EXPLOITS THE ISLANDS HAS SEVERAL SUCH PROJECTS, ONE BEING TOURISM. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT HAS NOT BEEN PROVEN YET THAT THE RUSSIANS HAVE A MILITARY BASE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN THOUGH THEY HAVE CONSIDERABLE DOCKING FACILITIES IN CERTAIN BORDER COUNTRIES.

". THE USSR, FOR WHOM THE INDIAN OCEAN IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE BOTH FOR ITS MERCHANT AND MILITARY NAVY HAS VERY LIMITED CHANCES TO HAVE A STRATEGICALLY SITUATED ISLAND IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, EVEN FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMUNICATIONS CENTER. IN THIS CONTEXT A VIGOROUS LOBBY IS BEING EXERTED BY THE USSR ON THE GOM.

" IT IS EXPECTED THAT OIL PROSPECTING BY TEXACO WILL BEGIN NEXT YEAR. IF CONCLUSIVE, THIS COULD MAKE OF MAURITIUS AN ECONOMIC POWER IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, SOME OLD RUSSIAN PROMISES ARE NOW BEING REINTRODUCED--ONE SUCH BEING THE INSTALLATION OF A FISHING BASE IN ST. BRANDON, POSSIBLY
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TO PROD TEXACO INTO ACTION.

". HOWEVER, IN ALL THIS COMPLEX MATTER OF POWER GAME, GOM KNOWS THAT THE US HAS ALSO A BIG ASSET--PETROL-POLITICS. IT IS BELIEVED THAT IT WAS THANKS TO US INFLUENCE THAT MAURITIUS OBTAINED VERY FAVORABLE TERMS FOR THE PURCHASE OF OIL FROM IRAN. WHILE THE COST OF OIL ON THE WORLD MARKET HAS GONE UP BY 400 PERCENT, THE EXTRA COST FOR MAURITIUS HAS ONLY BEEN 40 PERCENT. THE CASE FOR MAURITIUS WAS SUPPOSEDLY PRESENTED BY "A FRIEND OF MAURITIUS", FORMERLY ATTACHED TO THE US EMBASSY IN PORT LOUIS, AND PRESENTLY THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR AT THE US EMBASSY IN TEHERAN.

". THE 'FRIENDLY AGREEMENT' BETWEEN MAURITIUS AND IRAN MENTIONED BY THE PM AT HIS LATEST PRESS CONFERENCE, PROVIDES NOT ONLY

FOR PREFERENTIAL TARIFFS FOR OUR OIL PURCHASES, BUT ALSO A THREE-YEAR MORATORIUM FOR PAYMENT. THIS MORATORIUM EXPIRES IN 1976, WHEN IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO PAY ALL DEBTS AND ALSO NEGOTIATE FUTURE PRICES. WITHOUT U.S. INTERVENTION, THIS COULD PROVE EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE TO MAURITIUS. THE RENT FOR DIEGO WILL BE HANDY, UNLESS MAURITIAN OIL BECOMES COMMERCIALY VIABLE-- THE RUSSIANS BEING DISPOSED TO PURCHASE IT AT A HIGH PRICE." UNQTE.
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